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Carbondale News

Vol. 112 No. 3 Wednesday, January 18, 1984 25¢

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Thacher & Avery's Confectionery Store was an important North Church Street landmark

By S. ROBERT POWELL

The one-block section of North Church Street between the bridge over the Racket Brook and the intersection of North Church, Belmont and Canaan Streets, as well as that intersection itself, are rich in history. Thanks to Edith A. Gardner, Carbondale, and Cy M. Grosvenor, Elmira, N.Y., a great deal of that history has been recorded, and was reported in the August 17 and September 21 issues of the NEWS.

On November 14, 1983, we received a letter from Robert W. Avery (133 Somershire Drive, Rochester, NY 14617). Avery is the son of Raymond and Hazel (Thacher) Avery who, together with Hazel Avery's sister, Kathryn Thacher, were the owners of the Thacher & Avery Confectionery Store, 93 North Church Street (the white building at the curve of North Church Street, in part of which Sarah's Beauty Shop is now located). Contained in Robert W. Avery's letter is the following new information about the Thacher & Avery Confectionery Store:

"The store was divided into two parts. The counters and merchandise were originally located in the western part and the ice cream parlor was in the eastern half. There was a walk-through and open-service counter between the two parts.

"The parlor had about ten or twelve marble topped round tables. Each table would seat four customers. The chairs had three legs and the seats were triangular in shape. They fit very neatly into dividers between the table legs. I still have one of those tables and its set of chairs.

"This arrangement was reversed in the 1930s. The soda fountain remained where it had been in the western part of the store, but the other equipment and merchandise were moved into the eastern part. The openings between the two parts were then covered. The western part then became the ice cream parlor. It featured Mulholland's Ice Cream - a quality ice cream made in a large plant on Belmont Street at the Simpson line. There was quite a bit of competition with the Russell Stores for the ice cream trade in the period from 1940 to 1950.

"Both businesses sold hundreds of ice cream cones plus bulk ice cream each day. Cars were parked on both sides of Church, Canaan and Belmont Streets. This resulted in a restricted traffic flow many times. During this same period of time, there were two developments which changed the ice cream business. The first was the packaging of ice cream in half gallon containers at the plant. Up to that time, most of the prepackaged ice

cream had been sold in pints. Most customers preferred to buy it in bulk pints and quarts.

"The second development was the appearance of frozen strawberries in five gallon cans. These were defrosted and used for sundaes. 'Fresh' fruit sundaes then became available year around for the first time. I daresay most of us do not give a second thought to the frozen strawberries and half gallons of ice cream which are found in most home freezers today. Yet, both of them were big innovations at that time.

"Kathryn Thacher managed both sides of the store. She made excellent sherbets from scratch. Lemon, raspberry and cranberry were especially popular flavors. I can remember her squeezing the fruits by hand, grating the rind and combining the various ingredients into the mix.

"I can also remember my brother, Rowland, and I turning the crank of the mixer for what seemed hours on end. The store's chocolate syrup was also made in the 'back' room on a two burner stove in a huge pot. We all took turns stirring with a two-foot paddle while it was cooking.

"Mr. Grosvenor has already mentioned that Mr. Beeler sold roasted peanuts. I believe that my folks probably used the same machine. On the other hand, the store did not have a popcorn machine until 1938 or 1939. It was a brand new Burch machine complete with lights, seasoning melter and popper kettle.

"There was a red and blue neon sign in the window advertising the popcorn, although the aroma escaped through a transom. Oh yes, there were two kinds - cheese and regular.

"The store sold the usual staples of soda, milk, bread and cake. During the depression years, my mother baked coconut, orange and chocolate cupcakes which were displayed on cookie sheets in the bakery window. There were two cases for the display of cigars and tobacco. These cases had two levels - the bottom contained several dozen different varieties of smoking tobacco and a wet sponge for moisture control.

"The top shelf was composed of closely spaced boards. The fancier cigars were displayed there. The tops of the cases were about one foot wide and supported the less expensive cigars. The top front was composed of glass made in a forty-five degree arc. This could be raised by a handle in the rear after releasing the lock. I had never seen a similar case until 1978 when I found one in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Of course, the store sold about thirty brands of cigarettes. If you didn't like the ready-made, we stocked the paper to roll your own.

"What would a confectionery store

be without candy? We were very proud of our box and bulk candy. Some of the brand names carried were Wallace, Schraft, More and Schellenberger. The candy was displayed on dishes in a three tier candy case. The case was about twelve feet long and was fitted with sliding mirrored doors on the back. The candy was stored in five pound bulk boxes in back of the case.

"A scale sat on top of the case to weigh the selections. It was placed in white bags for the customers. It was always a memorable day when the candy salesmen came to the store to display their wares and pass out samples. The raisin nougats were always very popular with this writer.

"Daily and Sunday newspapers plus magazines made up a large part of our business. Sunday mornings were a very busy time because we sold so many papers in such a short period of time. At that time there were about ten different papers - including two from Philadelphia, six or seven from New York City and, of course, the Scrantonian. It is amazing how many of these papers are no longer in existence. I have a very fond recollection of crowded sidewalks along Church Street on Sundays as people walked to and from church.

"It was during the 1930s that the magazine explosion began. At first, there were the Saturday Evening Post, Liberty, Good Housekeeping and Readers Digest. Then, the western and love story magazines appeared. The first comic magazines were issued in the middle 1930s. Needless to say, the magazine rack quadrupled in size.

"The Police Gazette, Esquire (with its centerfold) and movie magazines became popular sellers because of their pictures of scantily clad ladies. These magazines were usually half hidden in order to avoid perusal by our younger browsers. It is rather humorous to look back at those actions in light of the fact that similar pictures are now regularly seen on our daily papers.

"Mr. Grosvenor mentioned the hours of some of the businesses. I know that we opened at six o'clock in the morning in order to serve the men on their way to work and closed at eleven-thirty after the crowd from the 'late' shows at the Irving and Majestic were served. Very few of the businesses in the area opened after eight o'clock.

"I have not dwelt on the details of our little family business for personal gratification. Rather, I hoped to show how business practices and merchandising techniques have changed in such a short period of time. For better or worse, confectionery stores like ours are pretty much a thing of the past."

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This is the first article I have done for the News in months, and it really was written by Robert W. Avery. All I had to do was introduce the article. The story is a good one: loaded with lots of details,

which, in my opinion, are very important in a local history article. I shall be curious to see who mentions my article to me. Many people noted that I was no longer writing for the News. Rosemary and I had a discussion about the quotation marks. I wanted the quotation closed at the end of each paragraph. Is that very old fashioned? Rosemary says that for multiple paragraph quotation, you don't close the quote at the end of every paragraph.

Thank you Rosemary. I didn't notice that she had done this until late in the day.